



PATRICK HENRY

*Orator of
the Revolution*



"I know not what course others may take, but
as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"

PATRICK HENRY

Orator of the Revolution

*"Of deep reflection, keen sagacity, clear foresight,
daring enterprise, inflexible intrepidity, and untainted
integrity, with an ardent zeal for the liberties, the honor,
and felicity of his country . . ."*

John Adams on *Patrick Henry*.



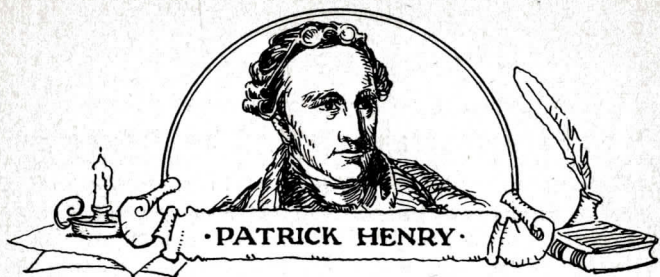
PATRICK HENRY'S FAMOUS SPEECH

March 23, 1775

Before the Convention at Richmond, Virginia

" . . . Three millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations; and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat, but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come!

"It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry peace, peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"



PATRICK HENRY

PATRICK HENRY, the Orator of the Revolution, the first public man of his day to declare openly that "we must fight" for freedom from British oppression, was born at Studley, Hanover County, Virginia, May 29, 1736. His father was born and educated in Scotland; his mother was of Welsh descent.

When Patrick was a few months old his parents removed to a farm, Mount Brilliant, twenty-two miles from Richmond. Here Patrick spent his boyhood. He attended the neighborhood school. At ten, however, he left school and studied at home, with about ten children, under the tutelage of his father and an uncle, the Rev. Patrick Henry, for whom young Henry was named. Patrick learned something of Latin and Greek, and rather more of mathematics, and became "well versed in both ancient and modern history." From his uncle, he acquired considerable knowledge of the Bible; throughout his life he was deeply religious. At fifteen, Patrick laid aside his books and his school days were over.

Trader and Farmer

IN 1751, when fifteen, Patrick became a clerk in a country store. A year later he went into business with his brother William, their father having set them up in trade. If Patrick was an unbusinesslike youth, his brother was more so; hence it was inevitable that the partnership should fail. It lasted just one year.

When eighteen, Patrick, with no work and no money, "rounded out his embarrassments," by marrying Sarah Shelton. Although Sarah brought Patrick six slaves and a tract of 300 acres of poor land, she was quite as impecunious as her husband. Patrick tried farming, but met with little success. His land was poor, his crops bad, and his family was growing. When, in 1757, fire destroyed his house, Patrick, now twenty-one, sold some of his slaves, and again started a store. The times, however, were hard, and in 1759 he gave up the store. Thus at twenty-three he had failed in three attempts to earn a living; he was in debt, but, abounding in health and enthusiasm, he was not discouraged.

Becomes a Lawyer

HAVING failed in trading and farming, Patrick Henry, twenty-four and the father of a growing family, decided to study law. He had a fair education, a good memory, a knowledge of human nature, and an ability to talk. Having decided to become a lawyer, he set to work to teach himself. "The best men always make themselves," wrote Patrick Henry, late in life, undoubtedly referring to his own experience. Just how long he studied law is not known. Whatever his preparation, he went to Williamsburg

in the spring of 1760, appeared before the board of examiners, and secured permission to practice law.

At the Bar

ALTHOUGH Patrick Henry probably knew little law when he took the bar examination, he continued to study whatever professional problems came to him. To his natural gifts he added a determination and persistence which brought about magic results. In his fee-books, still preserved, he kept a record of all his cases. Sixty clients are entered in these fee-books for the fall of 1760. During the next three years he charged fees in 1,185 suits. From then on, his practice was enormous.

In December of 1763, Henry represented a case—known to history as the *Parson's Cause*, but too complicated to be explained here—so full of public interest and so adapted to his talents, that it immediately brought him into prominence. William Wirt wrote of Henry's speech in this case: "And now was first witnessed that mysterious and almost supernatural transformation of appearance, which the fire of his own eloquence never failed to work in him . . . His countenance shone with a nobleness and grandeur which it had never before exhibited. There was a lightning in his eyes which seemed to rivet the spectator . . ." When his speech was over, "The people . . . seized him at the bar; and in spite of his own exertions, and the contin-



ued cry of order from the sheriffs and the Court, they bore him out of the court-house, and raising him on their shoulders, carried him about the yard." Such was the response to "a piece of oratory altogether surpassing anything ever before heard in Virginia." For the remainder of his days, Patrick Henry was to be one of Virginia's leading lawyers.

In the Virginia Legislature

PATRICK HENRY, in May, 1765, when twenty-nine, was chosen to fill a vacancy in the Virginia Legislature. May 20, when appointed on the House Committee for courts of justice, he appears in the House journals for the first time. A few days later, May 29, he moved a series of resolutions concerning the *Stamp Act*, which England had just declared a law. Audacious, yet unabashed, "this rustic and clownish youth of the terrible tongue, this eloquent but presumptuous stripping," who had been a member of the Virginia Legislature only a few days, literally assumed the leadership of the House in moving these resolutions, which declared: "That the General Assembly of this Colony have the only and sole exclusive right and power to lay taxes and impositions upon the inhabitants of this Colony, etc."

Henry always considered the authorship of the Virginia Resolutions and his triumphant championship of them the most important work he ever performed. They represented a virtual resistance, by the legislature of an important colony, against the *Stamp Act*, and, as such, were the first declaration of resistance made by the colonies. They were accounted treasonable; yet, when they were heralded throughout the

land, they roused other colonies to make similar declarations. It was as if Patrick Henry, with trumpet voice, had sent ringing from colony to colony words that were fitted to the need, words that cleared the patriot's vision and gave his heart courage. From this time, 1765, Patrick Henry was the leading orator and statesman in the colony—the idol of the people of Virginia.

In the First Continental Congress

RECOGNIZED in 1765 as a great lawyer, Henry, during the same year, charged fees in 547 cases; during 1767, in 554 cases; during 1768, in 354 cases. From then on until the outbreak of war, 1775, his private business declined and his public duties multiplied. "He had a leading part in all the counsels of the time; he was sent to every session of the House of Burgesses; he was at the front in all local committees and conventions; he was made a member of the first Committee of Correspondence," and when Lord Dunmore, on May 26, 1774, dissolved the Virginia House of Burgesses, Patrick Henry was the leader of the conference which met to decide what course Virginia had best pursue. Having assumed such multifarious patriotic tasks, he, naturally enough, was among the estimable gentlemen chosen to represent the State in the First Continental Congress.



August 30, 1774, Patrick Henry arrived at Mount Vernon, and the next morning, in company with George Washington and Edmund Pendleton, set out on horseback for Philadelphia to attend the First Continental Congress. The sessions lasted from September 5th to October 26th. Henry is said to have made three speeches. He served on a committee "to examine and report the several statutes which affect the trade and manufactures of the colonies;" he aided in drafting the famous "address to the king," and belonged to "the committee appointed to state the rights of the colonies." During this Congress, he exclaimed: "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American." John Adams later wrote to Jefferson: "In the Congress of 1774 there was not a member, except Patrick Henry, who appeared . . . sensible of the precipice, or rather the pinnacle, on which we stood, and had candor and courage enough to acknowledge it."

"We Must Fight!"

WHEN the second revolutionary convention of Virginia met at Richmond, March, 1775, in the old church which still stands, Patrick Henry saw, perhaps more clearly than any other patriot of his day, that war with England was inevitable. Consequently, on March 23, he moved that Virginia organize the militia, and said, in part: "There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free; if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending; if we mean not

basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained,—we must fight! I repeat it, sir—we must fight! An appeal to arms, and to the God of Hosts, is all that is left us . . . Gentlemen may cry peace, peace, but there is no peace . . . Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!”

Down to that day, no public body nor public man had openly spoken of war with the mother country, except as a thing highly probable. This speech “constituted Patrick Henry’s individual declaration of war against Great Britain.” The “We Must Fight” speech, known to millions of Americans today, still lifts Patrick Henry “almost to the rank of some mythical hero of romance.”

When the defense measures, which Henry eloquently advocated, were adopted, he was named chairman of a committee for “embodying, arming, and disciplining” the militia.

Henry as a Soldier

PATRICK HENRY held the chief command of the first organization of the Revolutionary Army in Virginia. He had not only been the first to declare



war against England, but he was also the first to commit an overt act of war in Virginia, by making the first physical resistance to the royal governor. After British marines took the gunpowder and arms from the storehouse at Williamsburg and put them on board the armed schooner *Magdalen*, in the James River, Patrick Henry, now Captain, called the militia to meet him, May 2, "on business of the highest importance to American liberty," and started to recapture the stolen ammunition. Five thousand men immediately sought to join with Henry. But no fighting took place. The royal governor, Lord Dunmore, alarmed at this outburst of patriotism, sent 330 pounds to Henry to pay for the gunpowder.

During the summer of 1775, Patrick Henry sat in the secret sessions of the Second Continental Congress. That he could do more than talk is proved by the variety of committees (some eight in number) upon which he served, committees which called "not for declamatory gifts, but for common sense, discrimination, experience, and knowledge of men and things."

August 5, 1775, the Virginia Convention appointed Captain Henry Commander-in-Chief of the forces in Virginia, with the rank of Colonel. In September, Colonel Henry arrived at Williamsburg, and after selecting a suitable site for a camp, began to enlist, equip, and drill soldiers. He soon realized, however, that he was to find his work, not on the fields of battle, but in the halls of legislation; consequently, on February 28, 1776, he resigned from the army.

First Governor of Virginia

WHATEVER place Henry held in national affairs at this time, there can be no doubt of his standing in his own State. He was the undisputed leader of Virginia. The Virginia Convention, which met May 6, 1776, declared itself "absolved from all allegiance to, or dependence upon the crown or Parliament of Great Britain," and set about to form a Constitution. On June 29, in this Convention, Patrick Henry was elected the Governor of the State. July 5, 1776, the day after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, he took the oath of office, and, as soon as possible, moved into the executive palace at Williamsburg, from which Lord Dunmore had fled the year before.

Patrick Henry was elected, unanimously, for three successive years, to the chief office within the State. Governor Henry's great task, during this Revolutionary War period, was to work hand in hand with General Washington, to keep Virginia's quota of soldiers in the field, and to furnish her share of supplies. During his third year as Governor, Henry was disturbed by the awful carnage of the Indians at Wyoming, Cherry Valley, and Schoharie, as well as by the British movement on Charleston, which transferred the seat of war to the South. His ardor and energy as a war governor are attested by the following letter from Washington: "I address myself to you, convinced that our alarming distresses will engage your most serious consideration, and that the full force of that zeal and vigor you have manifested upon every other occasion, will now operate for our relief."

Governor a Second Time

HIS services as Governor ended, Henry, 1779, retired to a newly purchased estate (Leatherwood) of 10,000 acres in the County of Henry, which was named for him. Here he lived for five years. His first wife, Sarah, who had borne him six children, had died in 1776. He had married, 1777, Dorothea Dandridge, who bore him eleven children. The year after he moved to Leatherwood, Patrick Henry took his seat in the Virginia General Assembly as a representative from Henry County.

Because of "the approach of an hostile army," Patrick Henry, January 2, 1781, moved that the legislature meet elsewhere than in Richmond. In May, he met with the Assembly at Charlottesville, but Lord Cornwallis sending a swift expedition to capture the group, Henry and his fellow legislators fled to Staunton. Henry continued to serve in the Assembly until 1784, and made two great contributions to American policy. Peace having been secured, he argued that local animosity should be laid aside, and that a policy of magnanimous forbearance should be adopted toward the Tories (colonists who had sided with England during the Revolution). Furthermore, he maintained that freedom of commerce among the States was as necessary as freedom of citizenship. He met all opponents to these policies with answers that were "beyond all expression eloquent and sublime."

With, if possible, even a greater hold upon the minds and hearts of the people of his State than he held in war times, Patrick Henry, November 30,

1784, was elected, for a second time, Governor of Virginia. At the end of two years, when he resigned this high office, he received the unanimous vote of the House of Delegates "for his wise, prudent, and upright administration." Henry resigned because he was in debt. His expenditures having exceeded his income, Henry returned to the practice of law.

To be nearer a business center, Henry removed from Leatherwood to Prince Edward County, where he lived until 1795. His legal practice soon repaired his fortune; when he died he was considered a man of considerable wealth. Having provided adequately for his large family, Henry, with great ardor and devotion to his State, found it impossible to depart from public service for long. He went to the Virginia Legislature, continuing his work there until 1790. During his last years in the Virginia Congress, Patrick Henry performed a lasting service to the new America, by insisting upon attaching to the newly written Constitution of the United States, amendments constituting a "bill of rights."



Champion of Individual Rights

FROM the earliest days of the Revolution, Patrick Henry was a champion of a strong central government. But, when the Constitution of the United States was drafted he bitterly opposed it.

He carried on his opposition in the Virginia Convention of June, 1788, held at Richmond to vote on the adoption of the Constitution. Henry objected to the Constitution, not because he favored disunion. "The first thing I have at heart is American liberty; the second thing is American union," he argued, and further protested: "I mean not to breathe the spirit nor utter the language of secession;" but he did object to the Constitution because it provided no protection of States and individuals. "A bill of rights," he affirmed, "is indispensably necessary . . . A general positive provision should be inserted in the new system, securing to the States and the people every right which was not conceded to the general government . . . I trust that gentlemen, on this occasion, will see the great objects of religion, liberty of the press, trial by jury, interdiction of cruel punishments, and every other sacred right, secured, before they agree to that paper." The debate lasted twenty-three days. Patrick Henry spoke every day but five. In a single speech he talked seven hours. He wanted the adoption of the Constitution postponed until his amendments could be attached to it. He was, however, to meet with seeming defeat, for on June 25, Virginia voted in favor of the Constitution. He had gained a victory in that the resolution of Virginia to adopt the Constitution, contained a "preamble" . . . promising to recommend to Congress 'whatsoever amendments may be deemed necessary'."

From June, 1788, until the ratification of the first ten amendments to the Constitution on December 15,

1791, Patrick Henry lent his best efforts in influencing public opinion in favor of these amendments, which, when adopted, embodied "nearly every material change suggested by Virginia."

He continued his practice of law. Although his private endeavors had been repeatedly interrupted by his attendance upon public duties, his legal business was enormous. For many years, however, his health had been failing. In 1794, when fifty-eight years old and well-to-do, he withdrew from the practice of law and, removing to Red Hill (1795), spent his remaining years in quiet and happy retirement.

Last Days

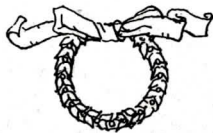
AT Red Hill, Patrick Henry gathered about him his children and grandchildren, to whom he was devoted.

Many offers of public office were made to Patrick Henry. In 1794 he was appointed United States senator to fill a vacancy; the following year Washington tendered him the office of Secretary of State and, three months later, implored him to accept the Chief Justiceship of the Supreme Court; in 1796, the Assembly of Virginia elected him Governor for the sixth time; and, in 1799, John Adams sought him to act as minister to France. Henry's extreme ill health forced him to decline all of these honors.

In answer to a direct appeal from Washington, Henry did, in 1799, allow his name to be advanced as a candidate, once more, to the Virginia Legislature. In March of the same year, he made a campaign speech at the Charlotte Court-House. This was his

last public address. He returned to Red Hill, where he died on June 6, 1799.

Although there exists no perfect report of any speech Patrick Henry ever made, there is adequate proof that his speeches were of high quality. Jefferson said: "I have often been astonished at his command of proper language." M. C. Tyler wrote: "There always gleams a certain superiority in diction,—a mastery of the logic and potency of fitting words." His genius was "powerful, intuitive, swift; by a glance of the eye he could take in what an ordinary man might spend hours in toiling for; his memory held whatever was once committed to it; all his resources were at instant command; his faculty for debate, his imagination, humor, tact, diction, elocution, were rich and exquisite; he was also a man of human and friendly ways." To Patrick Henry's lovable personality, to his keen mind, was coupled a medium of expression, a voice, a passion, a fire, which combined to make him the spokesman of the American people in their opposition to British oppression, and the great orator of the Revolution.





August 30, 1774, Patrick Henry arrived at Mount Vernon, and the next morning, in company with George Washington and Edmund Pendleton, set out on horseback for Philadelphia to attend the First Continental Congress.



Presented by

John Hancock
MUTUAL
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS